

New Jersey Best Practices Application

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.

The Expository Writing Program has gone through a number of changes in the last three years, but it is the most recent change that has shown the highest student achievement. In the Expository Writing Program juniors and seniors read essays from a variety of sources such as sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, science and fiction by writers such as Anne Dillard, Margaret Mead, Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking. Having exposure to such different types of reading increases critical reading, and exposes students early to college-level reading and writing skills. Students write a series of five essays on self-selected topics that reflect rhetorical modes such as narration, evaluation, causal analysis and argumentation. Then, they do a college-level assignment which requires that they write an argument synthesizing the ideas from a sequence of essays read from different disciplines.

The second facet of the program involves teachers from our program and surrounding high schools working together to share their ideas about teaching writing to help prepare students for college level composition through an organization called The New Jersey Writing Alliance. The Alliance initially consisted of community college teachers coming together to discuss the skills their college freshmen needed to transfer smoothly to four-year universities. Expository writing teachers from our district attended the meetings and have started to form partnerships to create greater articulation between colleges and high schools.

Objectives:

- To prepare students for college level reading and writing by engaging them in the types of reading and writing they will be faced with in a college or university freshman English class.
- To articulate composition requirements with colleges and universities around the state.
- To build partnerships with other high schools in the state by sharing the goals and objectives of our collective writing programs through participation in the New Jersey Writing Alliance.

The Expository Writing Program is **innovative** for a number of reasons. It uses what colleges and universities are doing in freshman English courses and builds assignments around those skills, yet it maintains student ownership of writing by allowing the self-selection of topics. In Expository Writing, students are taught rhetorical modes such as narration, evaluation, causal/analysis and argumentation. Each unit of the course focuses students on one strategy and asks that they practice the strategy by writing a paper on a self-selected topic. Throughout the course, students build on skills from descriptive writing to argumentation that includes all of the different rhetorical modes that they would most likely encounter in their freshman college courses. Readings and discussion take the form of debates, analysis of the way a piece of writing works to make meaning, and written responses to topics like gender, ethnicity or families in America. Students

also analyze writing and video in conjunction with one another. On a unit about gender inequality, students were given a reading on adolescent girls by Carol Gilligan. After reading the piece, they discussed and picked out quotes that reflected the experiences of adolescent girls in America. Then, they were shown clips of *American Beauty* and asked to analyze the movie clips using Carol Gilligan's concept of the adolescent female in America. Any time students are asked to stretch and think "out of the box," **high student achievement** is promoted. At the end of the course, students are given surveys to evaluate their learning. Comments such as "I never thought I could write like that," and "This class really helped me think 'out of the box'" show that students saw their own achievement and had the ability to do some reflection and self-evaluation of their growth as writers. This is a new model of teaching writing that addresses the needs of the "next step" in a student's education. By working in a computer lab, students use the Internet and various on-line resources like SIRS, Ebsco Host and The New York Times to increase their knowledge of a topic. The course draws on the teaching of writing as a model of thinking by empowering students to be life-long learners, integrating technology with topics in which students feel a strong connection.

2. List the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards*, including the *Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards*, addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.

3.1 All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences in a variety of contexts.

3.2 All students will listen actively in a variety of situations in order to receive, interpret, evaluate, and respond to information obtained from a variety of sources.

Cross-Context Workplace Readiness Standards 2 and 3

Before starting their writing on a specific topic, students achieve **standard 3.1 and 3.2** by orally debating current social issues such immigration laws, the American school system, welfare and the nature of gender inequalities. In their writing, students are assessed on their ability to tie in the oral arguments made during a class discussion. Contexts vary from class debates to role playing (e.g. one student is asked to take on the role of the author and present a section of his or her essay) and group presentations of specific essays, focusing on both their content and form (rhetorical strategies, thesis, effective phrases). Students actually teach and make connections between essays for rest of the class and the teacher works as a facilitator. Students analyze, interpret and evaluate information on these issues and respond orally and in writing. **Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards 2 and 3** are achieved throughout the course as students do research and obtain information from electronic sources like Ebsco Host, SIRS Researcher and other on-line materials. Students also navigate the internet and evaluate web sites for credibility of information. They also participate in activities from on-line writing labs at universities such as Rutgers and Delaware.

3.3 All students will compose texts that are diverse in context and form for different audiences and for real and varied purposes.

3.4 All students will read, listen to, view and respond to a diversity of materials and texts with comprehension and critical analysis.

Students write essays in a variety of rhetorical modes that serve such purposes as to describe, evaluate, make a causal analysis, argue an issue or synthesize the arguments of two or more authors. The heart of the writing course is that students are able to critically analyze important social and political issues in an effort to make a change in the world. One student chose to evaluate high school curriculum and make an argument about high school knowledge versus “adult working-world skills”.

3.5 All students will view, understand, and use non-textual visual information and representation for critical comparison, analysis and evaluation.

A mid-term examination asks that students apply an author’s theory to a movie. Students are either given a selected list of movies, or they generate the list in class together with the teacher, and then in an essay, they apply the author’s theory to the film. One example is a student who used an essay about the American high school and applied it to the film *Good Will Hunting*.

Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standard 4: All students will demonstrate self-management skills.

Students in the Expository Writing Program are given both short and long term writing assignments and expected to manage time to meet all due dates. At the end of the writing class, students reflect on their growth as writers, as well as their work ethic, ability to meet deadlines and manage time effectively.

3. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how practice met these needs.

The Expository Writing program meets the **educational needs of students** in a number of ways. It addresses the growing problem of remediation rates of students in college composition courses. It enhances reading skills by taking students through a variety of activities and exercises that increase reading comprehension, critical thinking and writing skills and oral discussion of controversial topics. It enforces personal responsibility and strong work ethics of students. Lastly, the communication between high schools through a group like the New Jersey Writing Alliance improve writing curriculum in the state of New Jersey.

The **objectives of the practice are met** with the following activities:

Formal Papers in rhetorical modes that are adapted from college and university assignments: Students write a series of six formal papers; narrative/descriptive; evaluative; causal analysis, and three argumentative pieces that synthesize the ideas of authors in a given unit. Examples of synthesis units include an ethnicity unit, an American family unit, and scientific/psychological unit. The process approach to writing is stressed with the expectation that students show all work from prewriting to final draft.

and include a reflection on their work and gloss notes to show changes in revision.

Portfolios: The growth that students show in their writing is evident when, at the end of the class, students are asked to write a reflection on a writing portfolio that they have kept since freshman year. In their reflections, students analyze the growth they have made in their ability to make an argument, write a thesis statement, organize paragraphs, write a logical argument, incorporate sources into their writing, synthesize and make connections between various authors from multiple disciplines, write for a specific audience, evaluate credible sources, and adhere to due dates and classroom expectations.

Oral Discussion: Students are assessed on their ability to articulate their thoughts on challenging readings. They are also expected to debate controversial topics such as stem cell research, drug testing of athletes and the role of family in America.

Student Surveys and Student Feedback: Formal student surveys and informal student feedback help determine the effectiveness of the practice. At the end of an expository writing class, students are given anonymous surveys that ask them to rate their experiences in the writing course. Some comments have been “I wrote papers that I didn’t think I was capable of.” and “This course made me realize the different kinds of writing that will be expected of me in college.” Oral feedback from students who have already graduated high school and have completed freshman English in college are the most rewarding. Former students who are attending local community colleges and universities have said: “I am so prepared for college writing that I am getting A’s and B’s on my writing assignments”, and “Freshman English makes so much sense because I have had the exposure to the writing and reading that I am doing right now.”

4. **Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district**

A comprehensive writing program, such as the Expository Writing classes at my school, can be easily **replicated**. Currently, other high schools in the area are building partnerships with local community colleges and universities to improve articulation of composition requirements. Ultimately, the goal is to create groups of high schools within each county in New Jersey that will meet periodically to review their writing curriculum. Eventually we would like to affect a statewide change of writing standards in New Jersey. The partnerships that are created with local colleges and universities will be used to help high schools develop writing programs that will help students become the most successful writers and thinkers possible. The writing program methods could be **replicated** by having representative teachers from different high schools work together as guest “curriculum consultants” for high schools who are interested in developing a more comprehensive writing program. The use of technology would also be helpful in that a computerized list-serve of participating high schools could be created and messages sent out electronically for calls to meetings and presentations. Materials, lesson plans, readings and sample student papers could also be shared among the many different participating high schools.